



The Atlanta VAMC Decon Team, like other medical centers that receive casualties involved with mass casualty incidents, received decontamination training May 26 through 28. Participants carry a casualty during the mock training

## Employees take on task to decon others

Atlanta VA Medical Center is improving its readiness to keep the hospital, veterans, staff and local community safe in the event of a chemical or biological terrorist attack or a hazardous materials incident.

Twenty five medical center employees volunteered to joined forces May 26 through 28 to don protective gear and,

for some, refresh their military-type skills in preparing for an emergency mass casualty incident and decontamination process.

The hospital is not an industrial decontamination facility, according to Joseph D. Jenkins, Emergency Manager for the

**See Decon on page 6**

## Why did you chose to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces?

### Charles A. Felton

Veteran, Army  
10 years



"I wanted to do something for my country."

### Kenneth Boglin

Veteran, Navy  
6 years



"I wanted to learn how great this country is, and what I learned was how to appreciate what we have."

### John Hammond

Veteran, Army Reserve  
4 ½ years



"The reason I went into the armed forces is to serve and protect our future."

### Eugene Burt

Veteran, Air Force  
20 years and 1 day



"I wanted to start a career through my service to country."

### Ken Cochran

Veteran, Army  
2 ½ years



"It was my patriotic duty."

### Ronald Momon

Veteran, Marine Corp  
4 years



"I served to fight for my country. I wanted to be with the best fighting organization this earth has to offer."

### Eugene Ellis

Veteran, Navy  
20 years



"I wanted to see some of the world that I would not have been able to see if I did not join. I served for the sake of my country, and I gained a career for myself."

### Charles Kirk

Veteran, Marine Corp  
3 years



"A buddy of mine died in the war and I went to [fight in his honor]."

## Why do you serve veterans?

### Judy Sanders

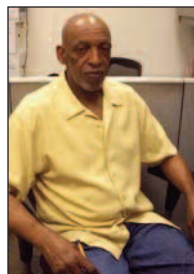
Volunteer  
VA Learning Center



"I serve because I like working with people and enjoy mingling with fellow veterans. I want to see that veterans receive all the help they need."

### Charlie Hall

Housekeeping Aide  
Environment Management Services



"I serviced for my country and this is my way of continuing to serve: by being of service to my comrades."

### Mercy Cherian

Registered Nurse  
Medical Clinic



"Because I love to support and serve our veterans."

### Oyin Olowokere

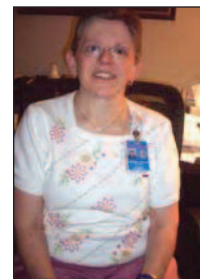
Administrative Resident  
Office of the Director



"I serve at the VA, because I enjoy being a part of a team that is dedicated to excellence in providing administrative services to our veterans."

### Cynthia Kenward

Health Systems Management Trainee  
Office of the Director



"I was inspired to help veterans by a POW from World War II. His story of being captured touched my heart. I also have family members who served in the military."

### Darin Olson

Staff Physician  
Endocrinology



"I love my job."



# Hospital breaks ground for new patient bridge



From left, Georgia Department of Veterans Service Commissioner Pete Wheeler, James Clark, Director of the Atlanta VA Medical Center, Network Director Lawrence Biro and Regional Office Director Al Bocchicchio scoop the first shovels of dirt June 19 to break ground on the site for the new patient bridge. The bridge will provide improved access for pedestrians between the hospital and the

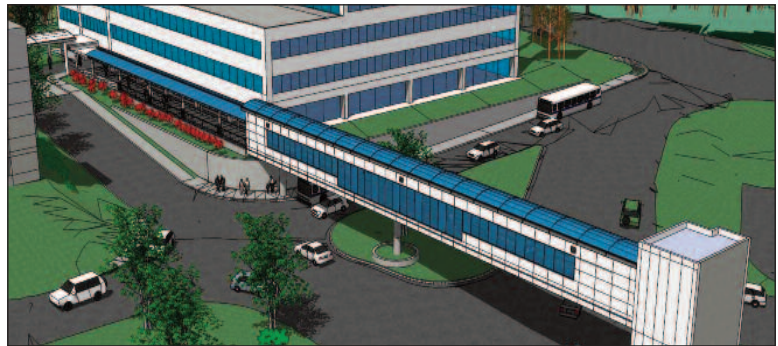
regional office. Construction will take nearly one year.

Left, Carlos W. Morgan, program manager for the Mental Health service line, sings the national anthem.



The Law Enforcement Honor Guard team prepares to post the flags.

*Photos by Peter Grattan, Medical Media*



Above is the artist's rendering of the bridge. The bridge will feature a concrete and steel structure, which includes a 190 feet enclosed, heated and cooled elevated walkway, a 145 feet covered walkway at the VAMC and a 160 feet covered walkway at the VARO, and a two-level, 44 feet stair and elevator tower structure. Right, a crowd of more 100 filled the tent for the ceremony. Bottom right, Robin Barnard, center, assistant manager for Canteen Services, checks on her display at the reception as Donna Jones, program support administrator in the Safety Office, smiles big for the cameras.





# Veterans, families meet Braves at Turner Field

## *Welcome Home celebration big hit for fans*

The Atlanta VA Medical Center hosted its 2nd annual Welcome Home event recently by attending an Atlanta Braves baseball game at Turner Field.

Atlanta's 2009 celebration raised awareness in the community about veteran affairs and provided returning combat heroes with an opportunity to feel appreciated for their service to this country.

More than 200 veterans and their family members enjoyed a pre-game party on a patio at Turner Field that included hot dogs, cold drinks, face painting, games, a parade and the extra feature: mingling with their comrades and Braves Pitcher Tim Hudson.

Educational booths on hand provided information from the Veterans Benefits Administration, Patient Safety, vet centers and other service organizations.

—OEF/OIF Program



Above, Atlanta Braves Pitcher Tim Hudson, right, signs autographs for veterans and their families during the pre-game festivities. Below, a tent full of participants listen to James Clark, Director of the Atlanta VA Medical Center, express appreciation for their brave service to this country.



Above, veterans and their families were able to participate in a parade around the baseball field before the start of the game.





# VA surgeon helps educate youth

**Valerie Green**  
Contributing writer

Dr. Alexandra Webb, Chief of General Surgery at the Atlanta VA Medical Center, is counting days until she and the Museum School of Avondale Estates executive committee receive final approval of their petition for a new charter school in Avondale Estates.



Webb and Laura Leckband serve as co-chairs of the executive committee of the Avondale Education Association. The committee is comprised of nine community members with diverse professional portfolios.

When House Bill 881 went into effect, creating a statewide charter commission, the committee decided to take advantage of the opportunity to build a new public charter school. They began the lengthy process in July 2008, which included creating the vision, mission, curriculum, school model, budget, partnerships, facility plans, staffing plans, and grant writing. The application was submitted in May and the approval process will be complete in December

2009.

"This is truly a collaborative effort. So many people have volunteered countless hours," said Webb. The group received a planning grant in January from the state Department of Education. "We are especially proud that our grant application tied for the highest score for a new charter school."

Webb, a native of Morristown, N.J., was inspired by her husband, Dr. Anthony Webb and their two sons.

"I've always been surrounded by people who place high value on education," she said. "My mother was the president of the Parent and Teachers Association, and my father worked to create a fundraising foundation for public schools. I received an excellent education while attending the public school system. I believe education is a right. All children should have access to a quality education."

She knew a project of this magnitude would require much of her time, yet she still felt compelled to accept the obligation.

"It was too important not to be done. Having a two-career family, which includes two young sons, places education very high on our priority list," she said. Her husband, Anthony, also serves on the executive committee.

Why charter a school in Avondale Estates? Webb responded, "Charter schools have more flexibility than traditional public schools and are held accountable for their results." She also believes their school model will allow more opportunity for parental involvement. The goal is to make "The Museum School of Avondale Estates" a public school of choice in her community. The curriculum in the fall of 2010 will follow and expand upon the Georgia performance standards for grades kindergarten through 3; future endeavors would expand it to the 8th grade level. The Museum School will partner with local museums and institutions to provide students hands-on learning experiences. At the end of each unit, students will build exhibits that turn the school into a museum for the community to share in the experience.

One of her most rewarding experiences was attracting a sell-out crowd during a recent fundraiser for the charter school.

"It was so exciting to see how rapidly community support for this effort is growing," Webb explained. The Avondale Estates Parents' Cooperative has invited the committee to be the masters of ceremony for the Avondale Estates 4th of July Parade.



## Steak dinner

James Clark, Director of the Atlanta VA Medical Center, offers Mizanuel Phillips the steak dinner he earned after winning the Wii bowling challenge held April 16.

Phillips, a resident at the Eagle's Nest Community Living Center, won the competition, 221-138. All the residents enjoyed the benefits of a steak dinner with all the fixings.



## DECON continued from cover

hospital. "We are a "healthcare system with the capability to provide decontamination and treatment to patients for life saving medical intervention.

"The training was business as usual for veteran/employees, as they have received the training as servicemembers. I knew they would volunteer to supplement the team. That's what noncommissioned officers will always do: step up to the plate."

The VHA Center for Engineering & Occupational Safety and Health purchased the decontamination equipment to insure volunteers have ample opportunity to train properly.

After a classroom session on how to properly protect themselves, employees learned the basics of caring for those who have been contaminated before getting hands-on scenarios outside the facility.

"Doing the drills gives hospital staff an opportunity to work together in unique or less common disaster situations. It will also familiarize staff on how victims would be arriving to the emergency department in the event of a chemical or biological disaster," Jenkins commented.

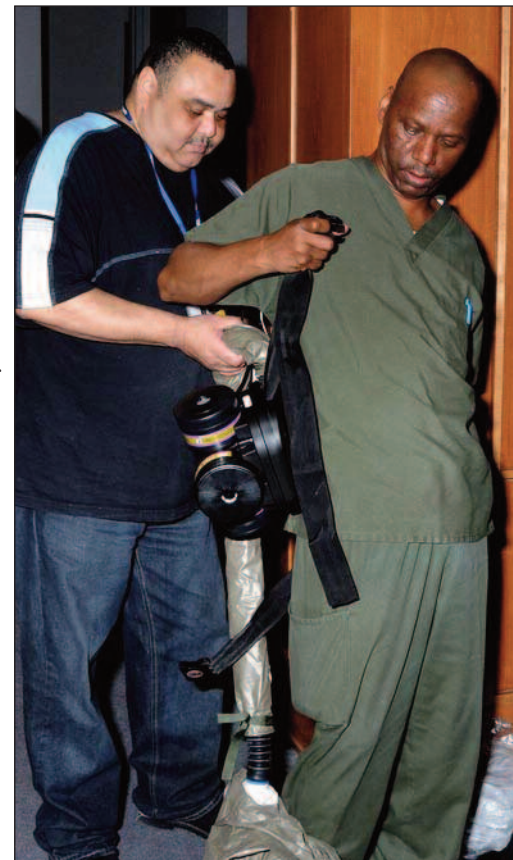
The large yellow, approximately 20 by 60 foot-long portable decontamination unit can decontaminate more than 100 people an hour.

Decontamination typically consists of the person affected removing outer clothing and having to be washed down with large amounts of water. This protects the patient from further contamination and from contaminating hospital staff, other patients and surrounding areas of the medical center.

As one of the area's Level One trauma centers, Jenkins said it was important for Atlanta to be prepared for any large-scale disaster.

"We would mainly use this for a large chemical event," he said. "If for instance, a bus was involved in an accident and the patients were covered with diesel fuel, we're able to have a person decontaminated and through the wash line within three minutes."

Should a patient decon become necessary, "the shower would be deployed and staffed by members from the Dekalb County Emergency Management Center, Atlanta EPD and our Safety Department," Jenkins explained.



Above, Mark St. Marie, a training instructor from the Center for Engineering, Occupational Safety and Health, briefs employee volunteers on the decontamination process. Left, Vernon Green, an administrative assistant with the Safety Office, helps Larry Padgett, a supervisory program support clerk, put on the personal protective equipment. Below, team members decon a training patient.





# Be proactive; know your DVT risk

There are two types of veins in the leg; superficial veins and deep veins. Superficial veins lie just below the skin and are easily seen on the surface. Deep veins, as their name implies, are located deep within the muscles of the leg. Blood flows from the superficial veins into the deep venous system through small perforator veins. Superficial and perforator veins have one-way valves within them that allow blood to flow only in the direction of the heart when the veins are squeezed.

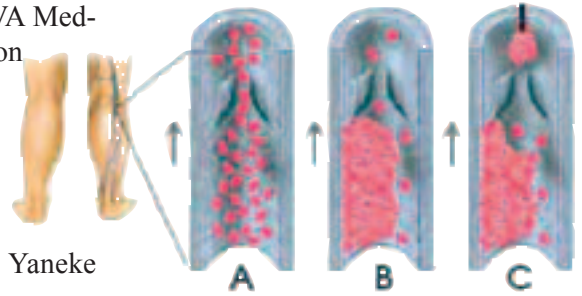
According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, two million people in the United States have deep venous thrombosis (DVT) and more than 300,000 people die each year as a result of it.

Dressing in their own version of the battle dress uniform (blue and white

scrubs), nurses at the Atlanta VA Medical Center formed a DVT action committee to educate veterans, caregivers and healthcare providers on the topic.

Team members include Sandra Dukes, Tracy Griffin, Phara Paulemon, Rene Flagg, Yaneke Duffus and Linda Parker.

DVT is an under diagnosed, preventable medical condition, Dukes explained. "It occurs when a blood clot forms in a large vein. A blood clot (thrombus) in the deep venous system of the leg is not dangerous in itself. The situation becomes life-threatening when a piece of the blood clot breaks off, travels downstream through the heart into the pulmonary circulation system, and becomes lodged in the lung. They can also form in the lower leg, thigh,



A. Normal Blood Flow

B. Deep Vein Thrombosis

C. Embolus

pelvis or arm. Diagnosis and treatment are keys to preventing a pulmonary embolism or blocked artery."

Blood is meant to flow; if it becomes stagnant there is a potential for it to clot.

**See DVT on back cover**

## REMINDER:

Employees submit your favorite recipe for the "Taste of Diversity Cookbook."

This cookbook will be published and made available to employees at the Diversity Fair Aug. 12th.

Recipes should be submitted no later than Friday, July 17th in the EEO Department (3A181) or electronically to [Timothy.Jones@va.gov](mailto:Timothy.Jones@va.gov).

## Suicide Prevention Lifeline

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a 24-hour, seven days a week suicide prevention service available to anyone in suicidal crisis. If you need help, dial 800-273-8255: veterans press 1. You will be routed to the closest crisis center in your area. With more than 130 crisis centers across the country, our mission is to provide immediate assistance to anyone seeking mental health services.

Call for yourself or someone you care about. Your call is free and confidential.

The Medical Media Service Line will host the next Director's Town Hall Meeting July 28 at 3 p.m. in the Pete Wheeler Auditorium. All are invited to attend.

## DVT continued from previous page

Patients can die if the symptoms go untreated, Dukes said. A thrombus can form if one, or a combination of the following situations are present:

### Immobility

- Prolonged travel and sitting, such as long travels by airplane, car or train

- Hospitalization

- Surgery

- Trauma to the lower leg with or without surgery or casting

- Obesity

### Hypercoagulability

(coagulation of blood faster than usual)

- Medications such as birth control pills, estrogen)

- Smoking

- Genetic predisposition

- Polycythemia aka increased number of red blood cells

- Cancer

### Trauma to the vein

- Fracture to the leg

- Bruised leg

- Complication of an invasive procedure of the vein

“All of our veterans who seek care here fit into one or

more of those categories,” Dukes explained. “Knowing this, our veterans are risk-assessed for DVT and educated about the illness, prevention and management on each visit to the surgical clinic.”

Some patients complain of having the following symptoms:

- Swelling, tenderness, discoloration of the leg

- Feeling of tiredness in the leg, especially when beginning exercise

- Veins in the foot and ankle stand out more

- A mild but constant internal ache in the leg and an odd “plugged” feeling

- Sometimes the vein actually feels irritated

- Skin that is warm to the touch and visibly enlarged veins

- Shortness of breath

As prevention, patients are often prescribed medications, encouraged to get out of bed and move around more after a surgical procedure, walk regularly and wear leg hose or support stockings.

“I would tell everyone to make sure he or she is checked out, if any on these symptoms occur.” Dukes insisted. “DVT can happen to anyone, but patients 40 years and older may be at a higher risk. Those with respiratory disease, cancer, acute infection, restricted mobility, smokers, varicose veins,

heart failure and a prior history or family history of DVT should ask for a risk assessment each time they see a doctor. It’s their health we are concerned about here. Our desire is that they live long and are comfortable, satisfied with the care they receive here.”



## Operation Homecoming

Writing the wartime experience

Workshop dates:

July 13, 20, 27 & August 3

Monday evenings from 6 until 8 p.m.

at the Atlanta VA Medical Center

Active duty servicemembers, veterans and their families are invited to participate in a unique literary program that encourages American military personnel, who have served the nation in current and past conflicts, to record their stories and reflections.

Free, weekly creative writing workshops are scheduled for July. Atlanta author and journalist Jedwin Smith, will assist participants in improving their writing skills.

Join more than 6,000 troops, veterans and military families who have shared their stories through Operation Homecoming writing workshops and activities since 2004.

For more information, log on to [www.operationhomecoming.gov](http://www.operationhomecoming.gov); contact Melanie Eisenhart at [meisenhart@atlantahistorycenter.com](mailto:meisenhart@atlantahistorycenter.com) or call 404-814-2063 or Anika K. Doucette at 404-321-6111 ext.7651.



## Leveque Cooper

for outstanding customer service support.

Your professionalism, knowledge and politeness have made veterans who call in for information feel heard, understood and welcome at the Atlanta VA Medical Center.

Great job!

--David Raper, veteran